DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 360 067 PS 021 553

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TITLE The Neophyte Early Childhood Teacher.
PUB DATE [90]
NOTE 22p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Teachers; *Child Caregivers; Day Care; *Early Childhood Education; Elementary School Teachers; Foreign Countries; *Job Satisfaction; Preschool Teachers; Questionnaires; Teacher Administrator Relationship; *Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS Australia; *Caregiver Attitudes; *Teacher Problems; Teacher Surveys

ABSTRACT

This study examined the needs of beginning early childhood teachers in their first year of work in primary schools, kindergartens, or child care centers in Australia. The study surveyed teachers in 1988, 1989, and 1990; this paper discusses the results from the 1990 survey. Subjects were 31 teachers who responded to a questionnaire that concerned their perceptions of professional life. Teachers were also administered Fuller's Teacher Concerns Survey, which consists of an open-ended question about teachers' professional concerns. The questionnaire yielded responses which indicated that beginning teachers had a positive attitude toward their jobs, the children they taught, and their colleagues. Responses to the Teacher Concerns Survey indicated that the majority of respondents wanted to do their best, but above all, to survive in their jobs. (MM)

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ED360067

THE NEOPHYTE EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER

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This research has been funded through the Trust Funds of the then SACAE and the SECS Trust.

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Background Information

Over the past decade or so, a great deal of effort, expertise and time have been devoted to looking at the preparation of teachers by the higher education sector in Australia. This veritable growth industry has not been confined to Australia however, as the OECD (1989) produced a report which suggested that while reform in the area of teacher education remain:

> "partial and controversial ... the challenge is to balance competing policy objectives, institutional approaches and traditions and the nature of teacher's work in ways that both improve the responsiveness and quality of teacher education and enhance the status of the profession". (p 2)

The challenge of competing policy objectives as mentioned above, has become more obvious in recent Australian policy documents, culminating in the Teacher Education in Australia : Report to the Australian Education Council, more commonly known as the Ebbeck Report, and which was a major subject of deliberations at the 1990 ATEA Conference held in Adelaide. It is clear to many people that the Ebbeck Report is a political document written with an economic justification; its purpose is to ensure that education will be a way of "kick starting" the Australian economy so that we may truly become more scientifically and technologically able, in order that we can compete more evenly with our Asian neighbours.

A paper presented at that ATEA Conference, unfortunately not for citation, so not included in the bibliography, suggested that :

> "It is not always recognised that education, including teacher education, is also an industry, is expected to contribute to national reconstruction, and is itself currently undergoing a restructuring which is revolutionary in extent and effect" (p 2)

The Ebbeck Report attempted to address problems inherent in our present system of teacher education, problems of too much content in preservice courses, problems of surplus students, the need for academic awards which are comparable with other professional awards and the problem of teacher induction. While this presentation is not an opportunity to debate the content of the Ebbeck Report, it merely highlighted the comments being made by other educators at conferences, seminars and in reports; Bradley (1989) at a Seminar on Teacher Quality and Career Development, argued that there is a mounting body of evidence to suggest that the more able students do not see teaching as a career, an area in which "there is substantial public criticism of the performance of schools and teachers". (p 12).

Other speakers at the same seminar, including Smith (1989), suggested that the quality of teaching is central to the quality of our schools and that :

> "the classrooms of the 1990's will require teachers who are more highly skilled than ever before". (Smith, 1989:1)

One of the prevailing themes in the papers addressing the issue of teacher preparation has been that of teacher induction, or mentoring or inservice education, or second phase teacher training for the beginning teacher. The OECD Report of 1989 mentions that in Australia we have no fixed pattern of induction per se, although informal procedures are in place in many schools, although :

> "Induction and mentoring for teachers at the time of their first professional experience is considered essential if the new teacher is to fit effectively into a new teaching team ... the government of the United Kingdom ... recommends the strengthening of induction". (OECD, 1989:2)

In support of this process the Speedy Report, Discipline Review of Teacher Education in Mathematics and Science, (1989), commented that it is a "quantum leap from being a pre-service teacher education student to taking responsibility for a full time classroom environment". (p 123)

The Report argues that the variable conditions experienced by the beginning teacher often result in the teacher's first few months in the classroom being a "baptism of fire" in which the teacher is left on his or her own to "sink or swim". While the metaphor is mixed, the message is clear; we must do more to support beginning teachers so that their induction to the profession is a positive one in a supportive environment in which continued learning is a positive, rather than a negative experience.

The Study

In the light of the material being disseminated in the various Australian and international reports, members of staff at the de Lissa Institute of Early Childhood Studies of the then SACAE, and staff at the School of Early Childhood Studies, University of Melbourne, undertook the task of trying to identify the needs of neophyte early childhood graduates in their first year of working in Junior Primary Schools, Preschool Kindergartens or Child Care Centres. Both qualitative and quantitative data were generated, through a questionnaire administered three times during the first year and the use of Fuller's TCS (Teacher Concerns Survey) also administered on three occasions. A suitable questionnaire existed (Gilding, 1980) which was piloted and adapted for use in this study, while Borthwick (1989) has argued that Fuller's model, expounded over twenty years ago in her paper entitled "Concerns of Teachers: A Developmental Conceptualisation", encompasses concerns of an extremely durable and relevant nature; Borthwick argues that the process proposed by Fuller, namely inviting participants to respond to the question : "when you think about your teaching, what are you concerned about?" continues to be widely cited in the literature and is therefore an appropriate method for identifying teachers' concerns.

The study looked at beginning early childhood teachers in two states in each of three separate cohorts, 1988, 1989 and 1990. This paper reports on the results of the 1990 data. For the purposes of this paper the data on the neophyte teacher's perceptions of the pre-service course have been omitted and the data from key questions relating to the first twelve months in the field have been analysed, together with the Fuller TCS material.

Respondents were asked to circle the most appropriate response to a number of questions relating to their perceptions of professional life as a teacher or child care worker. Choices on the Scale were (1) "very true", (2) "fairly true", (3) "not sure", (4) not really true", (5) "no, not true at all", and (6) "not applicable". A "no response" category was included in the coding.

The questions selected for discussion in this paper are as follows :

Items 90 - 101:

90 I don't feel I have any real status in my job

91 I'm really happy with my job as a teacher

92 I wish accommodation/transport weren't such a bother

93 the staff here really care about their work

94 at this school/centre the Director/Principal/Administration makes the decision

95 this school/centre expects too much of beginning teachers

96 the school/centre staff have really made me feel at home

97 the staff here are really concerned about the children

98 I'm so busy I don't know which way to turn

99 this period of teaching has been a real struggle to survive

100 this period has been a period of growth and development for me

101 I think I have performed well in this period of teaching

Results

The 1990 cohort consisted of 19 beginning teachers from the School of Early Childhood Studies (Melbourne) and twelve from the de Lissa Institute (Adelaide). Their positions are indicated below :

Melbourne:	Kindergarten	19
Adelaide:	Child Care	5
	Kindergarten	3
	Primary	2
	Out of School Hours Care	1
	No response	1

It should be noted that not all the respondents had positions in their original state; one de Lissa graduate had a position in New South Wales while two School of Early Childhood graduates were working in preschools in New South Wales and Queensland respectively.

Item 90
I don't feel I have any real status in my job.

Term 1 %

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	0.0	7.1	0.0	35.7	57.1	0.0
S.A.	0.0	9.1	0.0	9.1	36.4	45.5	0.0

Term 2

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.3	42.9	42.9	0.0
S.A.	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.1	45.5	45.5	0.0

Term 3

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	42.9	57.1	0.0
S.A.	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	27.3	72.7	0.0

Apart from two negative responses in Term 1, all members of the cohort were prepared to respond positively to the question, and this negative response was ameliorated by Term 2. However, several of the cohort responded as "not sure" in Terms 1 and 2. The responses grew in strength by the third term in both groups, indicating that all beginning teachers perceived their role as responsible, that parents and other adults saw their role in this same way and that they were responsible for at least some of the decision-making which occurred in the course of their day to day role. Some of the respondents in both groups were working in country towns, which tend to regard preschool kindergarten and primary school teachers as people of status, along with other "blow-ins" such as bank workers, insurance brokers and public servants.

Item 91:
I'm really happy with my job as a teacher

Term 1

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	50.0	35.7	14.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
S.A.	0.0	27.3	45.5	18.2	9.1	0.0	0.0

Term 2

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	42.9	42.9	7.1	7.1	0.0	0.0
S.A.	0.0	18.2	45.5	9.1	0.0	9.1	9.1

Term 3

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	35.7	64.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
S.A.	0.0	27.3	45.5	9.1	0.0	9.1	9.1

The responses to this question were interesting, and somewhat unpredictable considering the frustrations and disappointments associated with obtaining a teaching position at this time. Many of the cohort from both states were engaged in emergency relief teaching or were contracted for a one year period with no guarantee of job prospects for the following year. Only one respondent voiced any negative responses to this question or regarded the question as "not appropriate" which we can assume to mean "no true".

Item 92
I wish accommodation/transport weren't such a bother

Term 1

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	14.3	14.3	0.0	7.1	50.0	14.3
S.A.	0.0	27.3	18.2	0.0	18.2	36.4	0.0

Term 2

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	7.1	21.4	0.0	7.1	57.1	7.1
S.A.	0.0	36.4	0.0	0.0	9.1	45.5	9.1

Term 3

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	0.0	21.4	0.0	14.3	35.7	28.6
S.A.	0.0	27.3	18.2	0.0	0.0	36.4	18.2

Responses to this question are probably indicative of the "Term 2 Blues" by which stage the novelty of the position has worn off and the beginning teacher is beset by the enormity of the task, the need for professional support and mentoring, and the realisation that she will have to use her own initiative to overcome her problems. Term 2 is probably the critical period for neophyte teachers, when they come to grips with the special needs of each child, the advisor is pressuring them to make decisions about children who should "repeat" kindergarten the next year and parents are requesting advice about their children's readiness for school. Considering all these variables, it would appear that this cohort of beginners are "survivors"!

Item 93
The staff here really care about their work

Term 1

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	50.0	14.3	14.3	14.3	7.1	0.0
S.A.	0.0	54.5	27.3	0.0	18.2	0.0	0.0

Term 2

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	42.9	28.6	7.1	21.4	7.1	0.0
S.A.	0.0	45.5	45.5	9.1	0.0	0.0	0.0

Term 3

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	50.0	28.6	7.1	14.3	0.0	0.0
S.A.	0.0	54.5	36.4	9.1	0.0	0.0	0.0

The responses for this question do not match with previous responses. We can only conclude that the cohort either misread the question or that they have become disillusioned very quickly about the professional behaviour of their colleagues. It would require follow-up interviews to ascertain the details of these responses, but it is important to note that the negative responses, i.e. 1 and 2, persist throughout the year. Perhaps the neophytes blame their fellows for their own frustrations?

Item 94
At this School/centre the Director/Principal/Administration makes the decisions

Term 1

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	14.3	37.5	14.3	14.3	14.3	7.1
S.A.	0.0	54.5	18.2	9.1	45.4	9.1	0.0

Term 2

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	14.3	35.7	7.1	14.3	14.3	14.3
S.A.	0.0	18.2	36.4	0.0	18.2	27.3	0.0

Term 3

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	21.4	35.7	0.0	35.7	7.1	0.0
S.A.	0.0	9.1	45.6	0.0	27.3	18.2	0.0

The responses to this question are extremely uneven and inconsistent throughout the two groups of respondents and their responses throughout the year. Clearly a group of respondents, in both states, is sure that they are part of the decision-making process; not 50% in the Victorian group and nearly 73% of the South Australian respondents thought this was "very true" or "fairly true" in Term 1 and although the percentage of similar responses dropped dramatically in subsequent responses in the South Australian group, (55% in Term 3), a majority of the cohort maintained this view throughout the year. The large group of non believers in Term 1 in South Australia (45%) is worrying but perhaps it can be accounted for partly by their role as relief or emergency teachers, hence their potential for exclusion from decision-making.

Item 95
This School/centre expects too much of beginning teachers

Term 1

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	0.0	7.1	7.1	28.6	50.0	7.1
S.A.	0.0	0.0	0.0	27.3	45.4	18.2	9.1

Term 2

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	0.0	14.3	0.0	42.9	42.9	0.0
S.A.	0.0	0.0	18.2	0.0	36.4	36.4	9.1

Term 3

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	0.0	7.1	0.0	57.1	35.7	0.0
S.A.	0.0	18.2	18.2	0.0	36.4	18.2	9.1

On the whole, the responses are positive and remain that way throughout the year. On face value, this is a heartening response, indicating that centres and schools do not expect beginning teachers to possess the expertise of their more experienced colleagues. On a more thoughtful note, it may well indicate that more experienced teachers do not have very high expectations of beginning teachers; that is, any positive behaviour on the part of the neophyte would be a bonus. On a less cynical note, the responses may be due in part to the fact that many of the cohort were operating with untrained - or less highly qualified - colleagues in child care centres and preschool kindergartens, and that in such circumstances the beginning teacher's behaviour was perceived positively.

Item 96
The School/centre staff have really made me feel at home

Term 1

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	71.5	21.4	7.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
S.A.	0.0	54.5	18.2	9.1	18.2	0.0	0.0

Term 2

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	64.3	21.4	0.0	7.1	7.1	0.0
S.A.	8.1	40.0	20.0	10.0	20.0	10.0	0.0

Term 3

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	57.1	28.6	0.0	7.1	0.0	7.1
S.A.	0.0	63.6	27.3	9.1	0.0	0.0	0.0

This is a very positive response and indicates the accepting way in which teachers and caregivers at this level behave towards colleagues. Hopefully, the perceptions of the respondents were correct in this instance, but as the percentages maintained throughout the year, they must be accepted at face value.

Item 97
The staff here are really concerned about the children

Term 1

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	64.3	21.4	7.1	7.1	0.0	0.0
S.A.	0.0	72.7	18.2	9.1	0.0	0.0	0.0

Term 2

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	50.0	28.6	14.3	7.1	0.0	0.0
S.A.	0.0	72.7	18.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.1

Term 3

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	57.1	21.4	14.3	7.1	0.0	0.0
S.A.	0.0	63.6	36.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

These responses are very positive and match up well with the cohort's responses to Question 93, "the staff here really care about their work". A very timely response when the reports relating to teacher education cite lack of morale as a major cause for concern within the teaching profession and stress-related resignations appear to be at an all-time high.

Item 98
I'm so busy I don't know which way to turn

Term 1

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	7.1	35.7	0.0	57.1	0.0	0.0
S.A.	0.0	27.3	27.3	9.1	27.3	9.1	0.0

Term 2

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	50.0	28.6	14.3	7.1	0.0	0.0
S.A.	0.0	72.7	18.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.1

Term 3

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	57.1	21.4	14.3	7.1	0.0	0.0
S.A.	0.0	63.6	36.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

These responses are extremely interesting and reveal the kinds of pressure which build up for the beginning teacher; note the dramatic rise in "very true" scores between Terms 1 and 2 for the South Australian respondents. Apart from Term 1 results from Victoria the responses indicate a need for support, guidance and mentoring on the part of the neophyte teacher or caregiver.

Item 99
This period of teaching has been a real struggle to survive

Term 1

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	7.1	7.1	14.3	64.3	7.1	0.0
S.A.	0.0	0.0	9.1	18.2	45.4	27.3	0.0

Term 2

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	14.3	14.3	14.3	50.0	7.1	0.0
S.A.	0.0	9.1	9.1	18.2	36.4	0.0	27.3

Term 3

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	7.1	15.4	30.8	0.0	46.2	7.7	0.0
S.A.	0.0	18.2	18.2	9.1	27.3	18.2	9.1

In the light of other qualitative data these results are difficult to interpret with a majority of responses in Terms 1 and 2 refuting this statement. However the negative figures drop steadily throughout the three terms until in Term 3 over 30% of Victorian responses refute the previous argument and admit that life has been difficult. The South Australian figures are fairly evenly spread across the responses in Term 3 and with such a small sample it would not be useful to speculate on these results. Note the three responses in Term 2 "not applicable".

Item 100
This period has been a period of growth and development for me

Term 1

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	50.0	35.7	7.1	7.1	0.0	0.0
S.A.	0.0	54.5	45.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Term 2

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	57.1	28.6	0.0	14.3	0.0	0.0
S.A.	0.0	63.6	36.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Term 3

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	57.1	35.7	7.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
S.A.	0.0	18.2	72.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Responses in the area of "very true" and "fairly true" make up the majority of replies; only one or two responses differed from this pattern in all three Terms. However the breakup of the South Australian responses in Term 3 is interesting but not significant. The responses indicate that the beginning teachers and caregivers have remained confident and positive throughout their first year, provided that they have interpreted "a period of growth and development" in a positive light.

Item 101
I think I have performed well in this period of teaching

Term 1

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	21.4	71.4	7.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
S.A.	9.1	30.0	60.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Term 2

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	21.4	64.3	14.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
S.A.	0.0	9.1	72.7	9.1	0.0	0.0	9.1

Term 3

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vic	0.0	35.7	57.1	7.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
S.A.	0.0	18.2	72.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.1

One of the interesting points to notice in these data is the positive way in which the majority of beginning teachers have reflected upon their first year of experience in spite of their doubts, fears and concerns.

In previous cohorts the first term responses have been positive and promising, the second term data have revealed a drop in confidence and perception of competence, followed by an increase in positive feelings in Term 3. These beginning teachers, in spite of their concerns about finding and maintain jobs, in their anxiety about assisting children with special needs and in working with parents and other staff have maintained an optimistic, positive outlook throughout the year, according to the quantitative data.

The qualitative data were obtained from the Teacher Concerns Survey as developed by Fuller et al (1974). Fuller suggested that neophyte teachers are particularly preoccupied with themselves, with their own comfort, adequacy and success as opposed to the comfort, adequacy and success of their pupils. In support of this argument she quoted from discussions with beginning teachers and their concerns about control, mastery of content, the evaluation of supervisors, working conditions and whether or not they perceive themselves to be liked by the children. While very little is known about the concerns of experienced teachers, the available data from USA and UK cited by Fuller (1974) indicate that experienced teachers are more likely to be concerned about the benefits to children than are inexperienced teachers when responding to the question: "When you think about your teaching, what are you concerned about?" Such concerns about teaching assume some importance if we are to assume that they are expressions of felt need on the part of the neophyte teacher and could therefore indicate an interest in learning more about ameliorating these particular concerns; that is, the concerns could form the basis for the mentoring or inservice programs for beginning teachers.

The TCS is rated 0-6 depending upon the orientation of the concerns; 0 is non teaching concerns; 1-2 concerns about self and one's adequacy; 3-4 basic concerns about the children and 5-6 relate to meeting children's needs.

The data are indicated below, with an average score for all respondents in each state:

FULLER TEACHER CONCERNS SCALE

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Victoria * N = 18	2.6	2.6	3.5
South Australia N = 12	2.0	2.8	2.6

* One subject did not respond on any occasion.

The range in each term was interesting; Victoria had scores from 1-6 or 0-6 for each term, while South Australian responses varied from 0-4 in Term 1, and 0-6 in the remaining two terms. It is interesting to note that the beginning teachers who scored in the highest range (6, 5, 6) and (4, 6, N/R) were mature beginners, that is, over twenty-five years of age. However it is not possible to generalise from this supposed age/TCS rating as two other mature age neophytes scored at the lower end of the scale for all three terms.

The results from the Victorian respondents indicated a steady move from self-oriented concerns "can I survive?", "what does my assistant think of me?" to more reflective comments such as "have I learnt enough (during this year) to plan appropriate programs for the children? I feel I have, but will I remember all of it?", or "Sudden shifts between just trying to survive this teaching year and striving to attain my ideal". However, basic concerns remain in Term 3, for instance, this comment relating to parents :

> "I feel confident working with them in the every day situations, but what if they come to me with a problem other than to do with kindergarten, could I help them?"

The South Australian responses have their own particular flavour, reiterating the respondents desperation to find a tenured or even a contract job, instead of emergency work: "there is a need for inservice and job security", "I'm worried about my job prospects" and the somewhat acerbic comment: "Employment is another area that worries me. Unfortunately many positions are gained when teachers have personal contacts. I wonder how many teachers get their jobs on their own merits".

Other problems which were mentioned on several occasions were the need for more knowledge about behaviour management (called discipline by the South Australians), the complexities of administration, the need to try to find support for children with specific needs and the pressures imposed by advisors and parents when the subject of readiness for school is the topic :

> "I need to be able to make a judgement by August about the children who will be ready for school next year - will I be able to do this?"

Another respondent described this task as "a heavy responsibility". The very absurdity of this situation would constitute a very difficult professional dilemma for an experienced teacher, much less a neophyte!

One interesting Term 3 response relating to parents included the following comment:

> "concerned that I may be developing a fairly negative attitude to parents. However, (I'm) confident that having recognised these concerns, I will go on to improve them next year!".

I think she is anticipating working on a more positive attitude to parents rather than improving the parents in the year ahead.

While these comments on specific concerns are interesting and revealing, the real concern is the lack of a guide or mentor. Comments such as "the advisor is very busy and terribly hard to catch", (the advisor) "has more of an inspector's role than an advisory one". These comments, and others like them, highlight the need for an inservice program.

> "Inservice for new teachers would be helpful and encouraging; "I have improved but I need more inservice, e.g. "planning is still a problem;" "realities of the job and lack of inservice support", "need for inservice"; "lack of support".

Conclusion

The 1990 cohort of beginning teachers and caregivers sampled in this study revealed a great deal of commonality in responses in each set of responses across both sets of respondents. The quantitative data yielded responses which indicate a positive attitude to job, to the children, colleagues and parents while the qualitative data indicated that the vast majority of respondents wanted to do their best, but above all, survive. Katz (1977) has argued that this survival stage for early childhood teachers and caregivers is a time when the full impact of responsibility for a group of "immature but vigorous children" inevitably provokes teacher anxieties, and there is a perceived discrepancy on the part of the neophyte to anticipate success, thus intensifying feelings of inadequacy and unpreparedness.

Katz has stated that teachers at this stage of development require support, understanding, encouragement, reassurance, comfort and guidance, as well as instruction in specific skills and added insights into the complex causes of behaviour. All these comments are supported by the Fuller data, but Katz adds the rider that "training must be constantly and readily available" from a staff member, advisor or consultant.

Where do we go from here? We have a growing body of literature and research documenting the need for a coherent inservice program for beginning teachers and a growing determination on the part of Education Ministries and Departments to abolish advisors and consultants.

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